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Letter dated 18 September 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward to you the final document of the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development: Challenges for International Governance, held in Rio de Janeiro on 4 and 5 September 2007 and presided over by the Minister for External Relations, Celso Amorim, and the Minister for the Environment, Marina Silva (see annex). The aim of the meeting was to discuss the current situation and the options for moving forward with the debate on international environmental governance and sustainable development.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 54.

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Annex to the letter dated 18 September from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Co-chairs' summary

The co-chairs identified three areas of reflection. The first consists of points of general convergence and the second includes themes that were deemed important but on which further reflection is required because the necessary level of convergence has not been reached. The third could be defined as possible paths for future action.

Areas of convergence

1. International environmental governance must be viewed and implemented taking into account the balance between the three pillars of sustainable development. The environment is an essential part of the development process.

2. The paradigm of sustainable development lacks effective implementation. The considerable expansion of multilateral environmental agreements has rendered the implementation deficit deeper.

3. The current situation regarding international environmental governance must be improved. The status quo is not an option.

4. The United Nations must be the locus for dealing with the issue of international governance. In this context, the improvement of governance must progress gradually — step by step.

5. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the central environmental pillar of the United Nations. The importance of its headquarters in Africa was stressed.

6. There is an urgent need for coordination and system-wide coherence. However, the resources of the multilateral system appear to be insufficient for this coordination and for effectively implementing the UNEP mandate and multilateral environmental agreements.

7. The institutional structure of international environmental governance will be effective only when a clear mandate, appropriate, foreseeable and stable financial resources, and political authority have been achieved. The system is overburdened with excessive agreements and commitments. There is dispersion and fragmentation, as well as competition for resources and overlapping mandates.

8. The autonomy of the multilateral environmental agreements that have already been negotiated must be maintained.

9. Transparency in the decision-making process is a necessary condition for the improvement of the process. Civil society's contribution was underscored.

10. In order for environmental governance to be strengthened, there must also be a strengthening of national and regional acting capacities. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen instruments and mechanisms for capacity-building and technology transfer, such as the Bali Strategic Plan.

11. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must be a constant reference point in the process of international environmental governance. Poverty alleviation must also continue to be a central element of the debate.

12. There is an interest in developing a new paradigm for cooperation (North-South-South) that could help to make international environmental action more effective and penetrating. However, innovative mechanisms for cooperation — South-South and North-South-South (triangular) — must be complementary, and not a substitute for North-South cooperation.

13. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is as an insufficient financing source; gaining access to its financing is a slow and complex process, and its decision-making structure is deemed to be excessively complex. The GEF must, however, remain a central element of any future solution for international environmental governance.

14. There will not be any progress in this discussion without the constant exercise of mutual confidence-building.

Areas where there is no convergence and where further discussion is therefore required

15. The meeting identified the following options for the institutional structure:

- The transformation of UNEP into a new institution (organization or agency) whose role would be to coordinate all actors in the environment field, with an emphasis on resource mobilization, the strengthening of institutional capacities, technology transfer and the dissemination of scientific knowledge.
- The creation of an umbrella institution (organization or agency) which would articulate environmental and sustainable development, in the normative, cooperation and financing dimensions, in implementation aspects, such as technology transfer and the dissemination of scientific knowledge, as well as in capacity-building for complying with multilaterally agreed objectives. The institution would integrate the existing international structure (UNEP, GEF and the secretariats of conventions). In this context, the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development must be reflected upon.
- Maintaining UNEP in its present format, while strengthening the programme. There is a need to decentralize its structure, as well as to increase the decision-making and implementing power of its regional offices.
- The possibility of improving the system through strengthening/improving the Economic and Social Council, by means of enhanced coordination between the Council and its thematic commissions and other agencies was also mentioned.

Many statements were made in relation to the need for innovative sources of financing, but the importance of counting on new and additional resources and the leadership of the developed countries was equally emphasized. The importance of complying with the commitments of official development assistance was also highlighted.

Next steps we can take collectively

16. The universal treatment of this issue must be strengthened within the United Nations. Informal processes are meant not to be a substitute for a wide-ranging and universal discussion, but rather to complement such a discussion.

17. Means and modalities must be identified for the progress of this dialogue, aimed at bringing ideas to maturity and at searching for convergence.

18. Identifying core functions or priorities of the governance system and its potential resources may be a difficult task, but it would indicate a possible convergence on essential elements.

19. The discussion on environmental governance in the context of sustainable development would benefit from the setting of a long-term objective, or several short- and medium-term objectives, which may be associated with the area of institutional structure or with a strategy for strengthening and improving the system.

20. Once the objectives are established, there would be a need to consider a time frame with short-, medium- and long-term deadlines.